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AUTHOR Jackson, William J.
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ABSTRACT

This proposed policy manual for the computerized information retrieval service of the University of Houston System outlines policies for specific elements of its operation: (1) users--who is/is not eligible for service and for equipment use; (2) cost--rates charged; (3) responsibilities of searchers--maintenance of searching skills, scheduling of appointments and interviews, the search, the post-search; (4) responsibilities of the coordinator--compiling statistical reports, liaison and contact, arrangement of equipment repairs and maintenance, publicity, supervision, recommendations; (5) responsibilities of the office secretary--service to patrons, record keeping; (6) responsibilities of the library administration--staffing, funding; (7) complaints; (8) policy approval and change. An appendix describes methods of payment for computer searches conducted at the University of Houston Libraries. (JD)

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POLICY MANUAL FOR A COMPUTERIZED SEARCH SERVICE IN AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY

by

William J. Jackson

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POLICY MANUAL FOR A COMPUTERIZED SEARCH SERVICE IN AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY

DRAFT PROPOSAL

by William J. Jackson

Libraries are finding it increasingly necessary to establish the capability to do on-line searching for their patrons, yet this service has not existed so long that a firm idea exists as to what should and should not be done. It is quite easy to begin the service without any formal statement of policy or procedures. Doing so can easily lead to chaos.

As of March, 1979, there were only two documents indexed in Resources in Education which address this problem directly. The first, ED 127 912, David M. Wax, A Handbook for the Introduction of On-line Bibliographic Search Services into Academic Libraries, could be of great help to those who have not actually begun the service. It provides a number of useful suggestions for those who are already in operation. The second document, ED 144 557, is a copy of the policy manual used by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Their manual was found to be helpful in preparing this proposed manual; some of their sentences were used verbatim, and the general structure was copied. However, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst is organized and administered differently from the University of Houston Central Campus, and these differences show in a comparison of the two manuals. Even the location, urban vs. rural, has an effect on the operations of the two services.

It is hoped that, with the publication of this proposed policy manual, others will be able to see elements which are common to more than one search service operation as well as be able to get contrasting ideas on how to solve problems which have been treated differently in the two manuals.

Computerized Information Retrieval Service

Policy Manual

I. Statement of purpose

The Computerized Information Retrieval Service exists to support the research efforts of the University of Houston System.

II. General questions

General questions about the operation of CIRES will be answered by the Coordinator. The Coordinator will normally refer patrons who have questions about a specific data base to an appropriate searcher.

III. Patrons served

A. All faculty, enrolled students, and staff of any University of Houston System campus are eligible for service.
   1. Should the question of eligibility arise, the burden of proof shall be upon the patron wishing to be served. Proper identification must be supplied upon request.
   2. Special consideration will be given to the University of Houston student working on a dissertation, thesis, or other research project who is temporarily not enrolled (e.g. during the summer). Doubtful cases will be decided by the Coordinator.

B. Service will not be given to anyone who is not in the above categories. This includes the following people, who will not be served:
   1. Persons affiliated with other universities
   2. Alumni
   3. Courtesy card holders (including Friends of the Library)
   4. The general public and business community

C. CIRES equipment and terminals will not be used by anyone not employed by the central campus library. Members of the staffs of other libraries may be excepted from this prohibition by the Coordinator. No other exceptions will be made.
   1. Persons who are granted exceptions must be fully trained to use data base systems and must have their own password.
   2. Persons who are not employed by libraries or are not fully trained may not use CIRES equipment and terminals. No exceptions.

IV. Cost

A. All persons normally eligible for service (faculty, enrolled students, and staff) will pay on the same basis, without regard to status.

B. Rates will be based upon the rates charged by the various data base vendors.
   1. Rates charged by vendors are data-base specific; therefore, rates charged will vary according to the data base used.
   2. Rates charged by the vendors may be subsidized or surcharged by the library, depending upon the revenue needed to adequately fund the service. However, any subsidy or surcharge will be applied to all users in a uniform manner, except for those mentioned in section IV C below.

C. Should exceptions be made to provide service to someone not normally eligible, or should such a person unknowingly be provided service and later discovered to be inelgiible, that person will be charged cost plus 25% or cost plus twice the amount of any surcharge currently being charged normally eligible users, whichever is greater.

D. Financial obligation
   1. Patrons are financially responsible for all services requested.
   2. If a patron charges a search to a departmental account and the department refuses to pay, then the patron is responsible for all charges.

V. Responsibilities of searchers

A. Maintenance of searching skills
   1. Searchers are members of the library staff who have been trained in the techniques of using one or more on-line data base system(s). It is the searcher's responsibility to keep informed of the latest developments and new techniques for effective searching by reading the bulletins issued by various data base vendors as well as through the reading of professional literature. Periodic review of the search manuals and guides is recommended, particularly for searchers who search less than weekly.
   2. It is the responsibility of the individual searcher to initiate requests to attend workshops and to make all necessary arrangements. Requests for action to attend workshops should be addressed to the person or committee responsible; e.g., the travel committee for travel funds, the department head for time off, the Coordinator for selection in cases of limited enrollment or other problems specifically related to workshop enrollment or attendance. The Coordinator will not handle problems (such as travel) which would be encountered in attending a non-data-base-related function. The Coordinator will strive to keep searchers informed of workshop and convention possibilities.
   3. Searchers should not hesitate to consult with other searchers or with the Coordinator should problems arise or be anticipated with a search strategy or with on-line techniques.

B. Scheduling of appointments and the interview
   1. Patrons seeking detailed information about the search service will be referred to an appropriate searcher, depending upon the subject of interest. The searcher will arrange a convenient time to interview the patron. During the interview, the searcher and the patron will discuss the problem to be researched and choose the data base(s) to be used. If convenient, a search strategy will be devised at that time and the search will be performed. The searcher may also elect to defer preparation of the search strategy until after the patron leaves when other patrons or business must be attended to, or when the strategy will be difficult and/or time-consuming to prepare, or when the patron is not able or does not desire to wait. In such cases, if the searcher would like the patron to be present during the search, a second appointment should be made.
   2. Searches are normally done on an appointment basis. However, searchers may elect to do a search for someone without an appointment. This will be completely at the searcher's discretion in each case.

3. In cases where a search involves material with which the searcher is totally unfamiliar, delaying the actual search is recommended if the searcher feels that time to consult printed reference sources to provide background might improve the search effectiveness.
4. Searchers should anticipate problems which may arise on-line and discuss these fully with the patron before doing the search. Such problems should include the possible need to narrow, broaden, or otherwise modify the strategy as well as the question of the number and format of the citations to be printed. Failure to do this results in an unnecessary discussion of such matters while on-line and is an irresponsible waste of patron money.
5. Searchers will discuss the procedure for payment before the on-line search is begun. The patron should be made completely aware of the financial obligation involved.
6. The searcher should discourage searches which can easily be done manually. This is an excellent opportunity to introduce a patron to the printed resources available.
7. It is strongly suggested that the search interview be done in person rather than by telephone. However, many persons in the UH system would be greatly inconvenienced by the necessity of a trip to the central campus. Therefore, searchers may conduct interviews by telephone. The decision to accept telephoned searches is left to the discretion of the individual searcher.

C. The search
1. The presence of the patron during the search is optional. Searchers are encouraged to have the patron present when searching areas in which their personal knowledge is limited.
2. In deciding when to do the search, the searcher should consider factors which may affect cost, such as computer response time. Searchers should take whatever actions are possible to control costs.
3. If annoyingly slow response time is encountered on-line, the searcher should discontinue searching and try at a later time. Temporary search saves should be used to avoid duplicating efforts. Searchers should always check before beginning a search on techniques needed to cost-effectively abort searches.

D. Post-search
1. Cost computation and search log
   a. It is the searcher's responsibility to compute the cost of each search except in those cases in which an offline printout is to be received from a vendor which charges by the page, or when a search of an offline file is to be performed at an unknown cost.
   b. The searcher should enter information concerning each search into the search log(s) as soon after the completion of the search as possible.
2. Patron payment should be made when all work is completed.
   a. Procedures for making payments are listed in Appendix A.
   b. Payment at time of search--search completed with patron present.
      i. If the search is completed to the point that the patron need not return (i.e. no offline prints), then the searcher should make sure that the patron knows how to pay for the search.
         a. For cash or checks, the searcher should accept payment in full, or, if necessary, ask the office secretary to accept payment. Payment by check is always preferred and should be suggested. The search number(s) must appear on the record of payment (either the check or the cash receipt).
         b. If payment is to be made by IDT (Interdepartmental Transaction), the searcher should explain in full the necessary procedure. The patron should be provided with

the search number(s) and the total amount due. The patron should be instructed to call the Coordinator or the office secretary with the number of the IDT being sent, along with the search number(s) being covered by the IDT number given.

ii. The searcher is totally responsible for assuring that payment has been made or that the IDT process has been explained if all work is completed and the patron is not expected to return again.

c. Delayed payment

i. Searches falling into this category are those for which an offline printout has been ordered, a search of an offline file has been requested, an SDI search, or a search which has been done with the patron absent. The common characteristic of all these cases is that the person will return at a future time to retrieve the results and make payment. Any search which includes offline printing or searching will be included in this category, even if some on-line results are given to the patron.

ii. Collection of fees for such searches is the responsibility of the office secretary . See section VII A 4.

d. Deposit accounts

i. Patrons who have established a deposit account with the Coordinator may charge searches against the account.

ii. The Coordinator will have information about deposit accounts readily available so that it may be quickly verified. The patron should sign a receipt when charging a search to a deposit account. The receipt should be sent to the Coordinator.

e. Mailed out searches

i. Searches may be mailed to patrons who find it difficult to visit during operating hours. This applies primarily to persons affiliated with UH campuses other than the central campus.

ii. It is preferred that payment be received before the search is mailed. However, if the patron's need seems urgent, the search results may be mailed before payment is received. Searches should be referred to the Coordinator for mail-out.

a. Collection problems connected with mailed searches are the responsibility of the Coordinator.

b. When choosing a data base vendor for a search which will involve offline printing, Dialog or Orbit should be used rather than BRS since the cost of the offline print is known immediately. The patron can then mail payment before the printout is received and thus reduce delays.

3. User instruction

a. After a search is done, the searcher is responsible for making sure that the patron will be able to read and use the results. If the results of the search are printed on-line, the searcher should explain the printout before the patron leaves. If the patron is to return later to pick up the search results, the searcher should encourage the patron to telephone or come to the office should there be any problems in using the information.

b. The patron should be encouraged to ask for additional searches or bibliographic help if it is needed. The searcher should inquire as to whether the patron is aware of other useful resources avialable in the field being researched. Additional instruction should be given when warranted.

VI. Responsibilities of the Coordinator

A. The Coordinator is selected by the Assistant Director for Public Services and Collection Development in consultation with the head(s) of the reference department(s). The Coordinator reports to the head of General Reference.

B. Statistics--service
   1. The Coordinator will compile service statistical reports on a monthly basis. Statistics reported will include but not be limited to:
      a. Number of searches performed in each data base.
      b. Number of searches performed by each searcher.
      c. Number of searches performed in each system (vendor use).
      d. Number of searches performed by status (faculty, graduate student, etc.).
   2. These statistical reports will be sent to the head(s) of the reference department(s).

C. Statistics--financial
   1. The Coordinator will compile financial statistical reports on a quarterly basis. Statistics reported will include but not be limited to:
      a. Sources of asset debits
         i. Revenue from fees based on connect time charges.
         ii. Revenue from surcharge fees.
         iii. Revenue from discounts received from vendors.
      b. Sources of asset credits
         i. Expenses for connect time charges
         ii. Expenses for operations, including terminal repairs, search aids, training, etc.
         iii. Expenses for printing and other publicity.
         iv. Expenses for costs written off
            a. Bad debts expense.
            b. Bad searches for which the patron is not charged.
            c. Research by library employees for operations/publication.
            d. Searches to answer reference inquiries.
      c. Balances in any accounts (if such accounts are established and budgeted) for equipment repair, training, etc.
   2. These financial reports will be sent to the head(s) of the reference department(s).

D. Liaison and contact
   1. The Coordinator is the person who conducts all business, arranges all agreements and contracts, and resolves all problems with data base vendors.
   2. The Coordinator circulates new information about the data base systems to all searchers and keeps them informed of all changes in procedures or other matters.
   3. The Coordinator keeps all information necessary for smooth operation up-to-date; e.g., the Coordinator maintains a list of all data bases available with the current prices.

E. The Coordinator is responsible for arranging for any repairs or maintenance to the terminal and other equipment. The library business office will assist the Coordinator with the necessary vouchers.

F. The Coordinator will determine a fee schedule necessary to provide adequate revenue to operate the service. The Coordinator will request funds to be used for subsidies, equipment, training, demonstrations, or any other activity for which it might be deemed desirable not to charge patrons. The Coordinator will administer all funds of the service and will have total responsibility for the collection and disbursement of money as well as for the overall sound fiscal condition of the service.

G. The Coordinator will perform or supervise all accounting operations for the service, including analysis and checking of the monthly Budget Activity Report (BAR), and will act to correct any errors or problems in the accounting operations of the service.

H. Publicity: the Coordinator will be responsible to adequately publicize the service in order to make those who might benefit from it fully aware of its existence. Such publicity might include flyers, posters, newspaper articles or advertisements, or demonstrations for selected users.

I. Supervision of paper flow and daily operations
   1. The Coordinator will design all forms necessary to make the operations of the service as smooth as possible.
   2. The Coordinator will direct the activities of the office secretary in those duties which pertain to the service (see section VII).
      a. The Coordinator will organize a logical method of record keeping for the secretary which will produce the needed statistical and financial information with a minimum of difficulty.
      b. The Coordinator will resolve any problems arising for the secretary as a result of this statistical gathering.
   3. The Coordinator will receive all offline prints, verify the accuracy of the prints for delivery, and give the prints to the secretary to have patrons called.
   4. Patron complaints and inquiries (e.g.: about an overdue offline print) will be directed to the Coordinator for resolution (see section IX).
   5. The Coordinator will pursue overdue accounts by whatever means are available and will act to prevent anyone who does not pay for a search from receiving additional service.
   6. The Coordinator will maintain all files and records pertaining to the operation of the service.
   7. The Coordinator will assure that all needed supplies are ordered.
   8. The Coordinator will mediate disputes between individual searchers and refer serious problems to the appropriate department head.
   9. The Coordinator has final responsibility for all daily operations, including the accuracy of search cost computations.

J. Mainentance of searching quality
   1. The Coordinator will suggest to searchers, when appropriate, methods of improving the quality of searching or of reducing the amount of connect time for a search.
      a. The Coordinator will not participate in other searchers' on-line sessions unless asked; however, deficient techniques which are noticed will be mentioned.
      b. The Coordinator may choose searches at random to review the strategy in an effort to suggest ways to improve searching techniques.
   2. The Coordinator will work with searchers who have deficient search skills and will suggest methods and techniques for improving those skills.

3. If the Coordinator determines that an individual searcher consistently performs badly, the Coordinator may recommend to the appropriate department head or assistant director that the searcher be permanently prohibited from further searching. Destructive negative publicity resulting from poor searching must be prevented.
4. The Coordinator will recommend any changes in equipment and implement any changes in procedures necessary to maintain searching quality.
5. The Coordinator will arrange and plan all workshops and training sessions which are to be held in-house.

K. The Coordinator will recommend and/or implement any changes necessary in personnel, policy, equipment or procedures to assure the overall success of the service.

VII. Responsibilities of the office secretary

A. Service to patrons
1. The secretary will answer telephone inquiries by patrons who wish to find out if their search results are ready to be picked up.
2. In the absence of the Coordinator, the secretary may refer patrons wishing a search to an appropriate searcher if the subject of the inquiry can be determined.
3. The secretary will call patrons to notify them that search results are ready.
4. The secretary will deliver search results to patrons who come to the office and collect the specified fee for the search. The secretary will encourage payment by check. Procedures for payment are listed in Appendix A.
   a. The secretary will be responsible for fees collected until the money is transferred to the Coordinator.
   b. The secretary will arrange for someone to deliver searches to patrons during absences from the office.

B. Record keeping
1. The secretary will collect all the data needed by the Coordinator to complete the required statistical reports. Forms for this purpose will be supplied by the Coordinator.
2. The secretary will keep an accurate account of the funds received in payment of a search.

C. The secretary will serve as the typist for the search service.
D. Other regular or special duties may be assigned with the approval of the secretary's supervisor.

VIII. Responsibilities of the library administration

A. The library administration will provide adequate staff to support the needs of the service.
1. Reference staffing will be maintained at a level which allows searchers to devote adequate time to each search request.
2. Services which may be affected by computerized retrieval (e.g. Interlibrary Loans) will be monitored to assure that the final result of searches does not become unnecessary frustration to patrons unable to retrieve materials cited.

B. The library administration will provide funds or assist in obtaining funds necessary to maintain equipment or other hardware at a level of quality which will assist in service excellence.

IX. Complaints

A. Complaints about service should be directed initially to the searcher who performed the search.
B. Patrons who remain dissatisfied after speaking with a searcher about a complaint should be directed to the Coordinator.
C. If the Coordinator is unable to resolve a patron complaint, the patron will be referred to the Assistant Director for Public Services and Collection Development.

X. Policy approval and change

A. This policy will go into effect when approved by the Coordinator and the library administration.
B. Questions arising about policy which are not covered by this written service policy will be decided by the Coordinator and subsequently added to the policy.
C. All changes must be approved by the Coordinator.

Bill Jackson
General Reference
March 15, 1979

Appendix A (to be revised in final draft)

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON LIBRARIES/CIRES

Payment of Computer Searches

* PAYMENT IS DUE WHEN THE SEARCH IS COMPLETED AND THE RESULTS PICKED UP *

All payment is handled in the General Reference Department Office, room 111 of the Main Library (749-1217).

METHODS OF PAYMENT

Check: This is the preferred method of payment. The checks should be made out to the "University of Houston Libraries".

Cash: Payment in cash must be for the exact amount. We cannot make change. You may call beforehand to determine the exact amount due. A receipt will be made out upon payment.

IDT (Interdepartmental Transaction): This method of payment is only available to those authorized to draw on University funds.

Please note the following points:

1) An IDT is to be issued for the exact amount of the search or for an estimated amount given by the searcher.
2) All three authorizing signatures are required on the IDT ("Requested by", "Authorized by", and "Received by").
3) Direct the IDT to "Library/CIRES". This is typed in the "TO" box near the top of the form.
4) Send the IDT to accounting for encumbrance. It will be forwarded to use by that department.

Search results may be picked up before we have the IDT in hand. In this case, however, give us the IDT number when you receive your results.

*ALL QUESTIONS ABOUT PAYMENT SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO EITHER ALAN PFEIFFER-TRAUM OR HELEN TATMAN AT 749-1217. *

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